



Interview for the SheCOACH project

February 2025

Breaking Barriers: Greek Coach Eleni Kafantari on Gender Equality and Leadership in Basketball

Eleni Kafantari is an accomplished basketball coach with over two decades of experience in women's basketball. She has held various positions, including Head Coach and Assistant Coach roles working with teams ranging from junior levels to senior national squads. Her coaching journey has taken her across Europe, where she has made significant contributions to the sport.

In Greece, Eleni has served as the Assistant Coach for the Greek Women's National Team, achieving notable placements such as 4th place in EuroBasket and 9th in the World Cup Finals. She also led the U20 Greek Women's National Team to a second-place finish in the Second Division, securing promotion to the First Division. Additionally, she was the Head Coach of the U18 Greek Women's National Team. She has also served as a Head Coach for many years in the Greek Women's First League with great success.

In February 2019, Eleni moved to Denmark, where she took on the role of Head Coach for SISU and the Danish U18 Women's National Team. She later joined BK Amager, leading the team in their pursuit of the national championship. Her responsibilities expanded to include serving as an Assistant Coach for the Danish Women's National Team, aiming for qualification in EuroBasket 2023. Furthermore, she was appointed as a guest lecturer in basketball at the University of Copenhagen.

Currently, she is the Head Coach of BC Alte Kanti Aarau, a professional women's basketball club in Aarau, Switzerland for 2 seasons as a Head Coach with the U16 National team and this season she has taken on the U20. Last, she has also served as an Assistant coach with the Swiss Women's National Team.



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How Can Gender Equality Be Promoted?

Gender equality in sports is critical for me. Sports is nothing but a snapshot of our society and at this point I would like to mention something that is astonishing to me, 94% of women in C-suite jobs were former athletes. To become more specific, specifically in basketball, which is my area of interest, the key is not only to encourage girls and women to join the sport but also to create conditions that allow them to stay and thrive in it for the long term.

From both a practical and symbolic perspective, it is crucial to design and implement strategies that secure public spaces for girls and women, ensuring they can engage in the sport without external obstacles. Additionally, programs that provide access to resources, decision-making, and organizational roles can be highly beneficial, helping girls and women actively participate in the management and operation of their teams.

Another essential step is to create opportunities and incentives for women in all professional roles within basketball coaches, referees, administrative staff, and even female fans, so that women's basketball teams and leagues are managed by professionals rather than volunteers. There are many capable and motivated women who simply need the right opportunities and incentives, such as fair pay, proper equipment, and professional training, to pursue careers in women's basketball.

Lastly, all efforts to promote gender equality must be deeply integrated into the community to succeed. Otherwise, they will fail to bring meaningful change.

What Are the Main Aspects of Women's Empowerment?

For me, the key to women's empowerment in basketball is breaking down the barriers that keep women away from the sport, not just by creating participation opportunities, but by ensuring they have influence and leadership roles within it.

It is vital to recognize women's skills and contributions to basketball, not only as players but also as decision-makers. At the same time, efforts should focus on developing the skills of women who want to be involved in the sport in any capacity and promoting strong female role models for others to follow. A 2023 Deloitte survey found that 69% of women who earn more than \$100,000 per year and are in leadership roles played competitive sports and 85% of women who played sports say the skills they developed playing sports were important to success in their professional careers.

Education, training, and certification for women as coaches and referees are particularly valuable, as they not only provide essential qualifications but also open doors for professional advancement. In this sense, well-structured educational programs can become a driving force for gender equality in basketball, shaping a sports environment where women can lead, grow, and succeed. These programs should focus on empowering women to take on leadership roles within teams and federations while equipping them with the necessary tools to do so.

To summarize, the three most important aspects of empowering women in basketball are education, direct opportunities, and a strong, supportive community.



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What Is an Example of Gender Bias You Have Experienced in Your Coaching Career?

Unfortunately, my experiences with gender bias in my coaching career are not unique.

I have faced discrimination in terms of salary and career advancement opportunities. I strongly believe that my professional growth has been limited due to gender stereotypes. For example, I may be overlooked for a higher coaching or administrative position simply because some assume that, as a woman, I have fewer qualifications, less ambition to lead, or that I am content with lower pay. Also, we see a lot of male coaches in Female leagues but not the vice versa scenario. Why aren't there any women's coaches in Men's Euroleague or NBA staff crews? It is a matter of bias, coaching is nothing but leading a team from the bench, leading is unconsciously tied with masculinity. But true leaders never rely on force, true leaders inspire.

Sadly, this perception that leadership and sports are inherently tied to masculinity remains strong. What comes to most people's minds when they hear the word Head Coach is a man, this is called an unconscious bias. The only real solution to overcoming this bias is to challenge these stereotypes and prejudices while also implementing policies that ensure leadership positions in women's sports are filled by women.

Only when these changes take place will people truly understand that women are not only capable of leading in basketball but also in any leadership role and they deserve to be paid accordingly.



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